

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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AMEMBASSY LISBON
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EO 11652 NA
TAGS MILI PINT BR
SUBJECT: REACTION TO FROTA DISMISSAL

REF: BRASILIA 8328

1. SUMMARY. PRESS HAS REPORTED FULLY EVENTS OF OCTOBER 12 SURROUNDING REMOVAL OF ARMY MINISTER FROTA, INCLUDING TEXTS OF FROTA'S STRONG STATEMENT AS WELL AS PRESIDENTIAL PALACE NEWS RELEASE RE DISMISSAL, AND BRIEF SPEECHES BY NEW ARMY MINISTER BETHLEM AND PRESIDENT UPON BETHLEM'S ACCESSION TO OFFICE. UNIDENTIFIED PRESIDENTIAL PALACE SOURCE TOLD PRESS THAT DISMISSAL WAS DISCIPLINARY ACT BY PRESIDENT, AND WARNED AGAINST FURTHER FROTA ACTIVITY ALONG LINES OF HIS STATEMENT. SOURCE ALSO CLAIMED DISMISSAL DEMONSTRATED TOTALITY OF GEISEL'S CONTROL OVER COUNTRY AND MILITARY. ANOTHER UNIDENTIFIED PALACE SOURCE (PROBABLY CIVIL HOUSEHOLD CHIEF GOLBERG) ACIDLY REFUTED FROTA'S STATEMENT POINT BY POINT. PRESIDENTIAL PALACE SPOKESMAN DENIED OCTOBER 13 THAT GOB WOULD
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PUNISH FROTA. EARLY EDITORIAL REACTION HAS DEPLORED THAT DISMISSAL HAS ONCE AGAIN POINTED UP FACT THAT BRAZIL LACKS INSTITUTIONS FOR PEACEFUL CHANGE. SEE REFTTEL FOR CAUTIOUS CONGRESSIONAL REACTION TO DISMISSAL. END SUMMARY.

2. IN BRIEF STATEMENT UPON INTRODUCTION OF NEW ARMY MINISTER BETHLEM, PRESIDENT GEISEL STRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT NEW MINISTER

WOULD MAINTAIN THE ARMY UNITY AND WORK TO IMPROVE ARMY AS AN INSTITUTION. BETHLEM IN RESPONSE NOTED HIS SURPRISE AT BEING CHOSEN, THANKED PRESIDENT FOR HIS SUPPORT, AND PROMISED TO DO HIS BEST IN NEW POSITION. IN BRIEF TWO MINUTE CEREMONY ATTENDED BY FIVE MEMBERS OF THE ARMY HIGH COMMAND, FROTA AND BETHLEM TRANSFERED OFFICE EARLY EVENING OF OCTOBER 12 WITHOUT INCIDENT.

3. IN BACKGROUNDER BASED ON PLANALTO (PRESIDENTIAL PALACE) SOURCE, JORNAL DE BRASILIA REPORTED OCTOBER 13 THAT PRESIDENT WAS MOVED TO ACT AFTER IT BECAME CLEAR THAT FROTA, THROUGH HIS STAFF AND ARENA POLITICIANS, WAS TRYING TO INFLUENCE THE SUCCESSION PROCESS.

4. PLANALTO SOURCE INDICATED THAT FOR SOME MONTHS THERE HAD BEEN A DETERIORATION IN RELATIONS BETWEEN FROTA AND GEISEL. SOURCE ADDED THAT FROTA PRESS RELEASE WAS CONSIDERED "SUBVERSIVE" BY PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, BUT THAT GOVERNMENT WAS NOT INCLINED TO PUNISH FROTA FURTHER PARTLY BECAUSE IT CONSIDERED THAT THE NOTE WAS DRAFTED NOT BY FORTA PERSONALLY, BUT BY SOMEONE CLOSE TO HIM. SOURCE WARNED, HOWEVER, AGAINST FURTHER FROTA ACTIVITY ALONG LINES OF HIS STATEMENT. SOURCE SAID GOVERNMENT SAW NO RISK OF REACTION FROM TROOPS OVER FROTA DISMISSAL, AND STRESSED FROTA DID NOT CONTROL ARMY BECAUSE STRATEGIC COMMANDS WERE IN THE HANDS OF GENERALS LOYAL TO PRRESIDENT. DISMISSAL, HE CONTINUED, WAS A CLEAR INDICATION THAT GEISEL HAD ABSOLUTE CONTROL OVER THE COUNTRY INCLUDING THE ARMED FORCES. SOURCE SAID IT WAS ALSO CLEAR NOW THAT SUCCESSION WOULD BE OPENLY DEBATED ONLY WNE PRESIDENT DESIRED, I.E. IN JANUARY. SOURCE ALSO INDI LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CATED THAT FROTA COULD STILL PURSUE HIS CANDIDACY FOR THE PRESIDENCY, BUT THOUGHT FIGUEIREDO CANDIDACY HAD BEEN AIDED BY DISMISSAL. SOURCE STRESSED THAT FROTA WAS NOT DISMISSED TO HELP ONE OR ANOTHER CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT; HIS DISMISSAL REPRESENTED A DISCIPLINARY ACT BY THE PRESIDENT.

5. PRESS NOTED SPECULATION IN BRASILIA THAT PRESIDENTIAL CIVIL HOUSEHOLD CHIEF GOLBERY AND PLANNING MINISTER VELLOSO WOULD DRAFT COORDINATED REPLY TO FROTA STATEMENT. UNIDENTIFIED PLANALTO SOURCE (PROBABLY GOLBERY) REFUTED STATEMENT POINT BY POINT TO JORNAL DE BRASILIA OCTOBER 12. SOURCE SAID FROTA'S STATEMENT DEMONSTRATED THE "OBSCURANTISM AND INEPTNESS" OF THE GENERAL, AND ADDED HIS IDEAS WERE SO RETROGRADE THEY WOULD LEAD THE NATION INTO CHAOS. SOURCE ALSO ACCUSED FROTA OF "SICK ANTI-COMMUNISM" AND SEEING "COMMUNISTS IN THE FOUR CORNERS OF HIS HOUSE." ON OCTOBER 13 ARENA LEADERS IN BOTH CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES (BONIFACIO) AND SENATE (REZENDE) REFUTED TO PRESS POINTS CRITICIZING GOVERNMENT CONTAINED IN FROTA'S STATEMENT.

6. PRESIDENTIAL PALACE SPOKESMAN COLONEL CAMARGO TOLD PRESS OCTOBER 13 THAT RUMORS CIRCULATING OF POSSIBLE IMPRISONMENT OF FROTA HAD NO

BASIS. CAMARGO ADDED THAT AS FAR AS THE GOVERNMENT WAS CONCERNED, THE MATTER WAS NOW CLOSED. HE ALSO DENIED THAT VELLOSO AND GOLBERY WERE PREPARING A REPLY TO THE FROTA STATEMENT.

7. CIVILIAN CANDIDATE SENATOR MAGALHAES PINTO CLAIMED THAT HE WOULD CONTINUE HIS CAMPAIGN FOR THE PRESIDENCY. SENATOR SAID THAT CHANGE OF ARMY MINISTERS WOULD ONLY ALTER HIS CAMPAIGN SLIGHTLY, CAUSING HIM TO CHANGE HIS TRIP PLANS SOMEWHAT. HE INDICATED THAT HE WOULD CONTINUE HIS BROAD CONTACTS IN SEARCH OF SUPPORT.

8. WHILE NOTING THAT ITAMARATY HAD DECLINED TO COMMENT ON ANY ASPECT OF DISMISSAL, JORNAL DE BRASILIA ATTRIBUTED TO UNIDENTIED FOREIGN DIPLOMATS OPINION THAT GEISEL HAD DEMONSTRATED HIS CONTROL OVER ARMY AND POLITICAL SITUATION. THESE DIPLOMATS WERE SAID TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VIEW DISMISSAL AS STRENGTHENING GEISEL'S HAND INTERNALLY AS HE PREPARED FOR SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN NOVEMBER ON NUCLEAR ISSUES AND HUMAN RIGHTS. (FYI EMBASSY RESPONDED TO FEW PRESS QUIERIES ON MATTER WITH FLAT "NO COMMENT" ON GROUNDS IT INTERNAL BRAZILIAN MATTER.)

9. IN FIRST EDITORIAL REACTION, O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO LAMENTED THAT DISMISSAL DEMONSTRATES EACH NEW SUCCESSION PROCESS BECOMES A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN OPPOSING FORCES. PAPER DEPLORED THAT WITHOUT INSTITUTIONS COUNTRY COULD NOT PLAN FOR THE LONG TERM, AND THAT EVERY SHORT TERM DECISION MUST ANTICIPATE COMPLICATING POLITICAL PROBLEMS. O ESTADO ALSO CLAIMED THAT FROTA'S REMOVAL HAD NOT SOLVED THE PROBLEM CREATED BY THE HARDLINE VIEW OF BRAZILIAN POLITICS. PAPER CONCLUDED THAT REMOVAL IS BUT ANOTHER ELEMENT OF CRISIS WHICH CANNOT BE SOLVED WITHOUT INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE.

10. SIMILARLY JORNAL DO BRASIL NOTED THAT MILITARY UNITY IS THE ONLY FUNDAMENTAL INSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLE IN BRAZIL. IT APPLAUDED FACT THAT DISMISSAL WAS CARRIED OUT IN A RELATIVELY CIVILIZED FORM, BUT CLAIMED MISSION OF BRAZILIAN SOCIETY IS TO SEARCH FOR MORE EFFICIENT INSTITUTIONS TO EFFECT POLITICAL CHANGE.
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